



Mayors' /Chiefs' Bootcamp

February 25, 2026

NWTAC



MY COMMUNITY
MATTERS

“”
nwtac
NWT Association of Communities

Welcome...

Objective of today

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graph TD; A[Objective of today] --> B[Agenda]; B --> C[Ground rules]; C --> D[Handbook]; D --> E[Introductions and Expectations];
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Agenda

Ground rules

Handbook

Introductions and Expectations

Introductions

Your name

Your community

Where you're from, where your family is from

What you would like to get out of the Bootcamp

What you like about being Mayor/Chief

What do you wish there was less of?



If you could be in an Olympic sport, which one would it be?

Current Reality for Local Governments

The issues are complex

Expectations are high

Governments are interconnected

Resources are limited

Governing is messy

Technology changes governing

Feedback is instant

You can't please everyone

There is no perfect solution

Collaboration is key

Public service isn't about winning popularity contests

Sometimes tough, unpopular decisions are necessary





Leading Local Government

- Being Mayor or Chief is rewarding – residents chose you to head up Council, they have faith in you as a leader
- Its also hard – at times, residents may get angry with you over decisions and directions you and Council took
- As the role of local governments evolve, Mayors & Chiefs face more complex issues and challenging decisions
- You can't make everyone happy and you will be criticized for decisions you make and work that your local government does

Rarely is there Glory...

Sections Search

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Norman Wells seeks to have Frank Pope declared Canada's Top Mayor

 Ollie Williams · Thursday December 10, 2020 at 6:05am MT

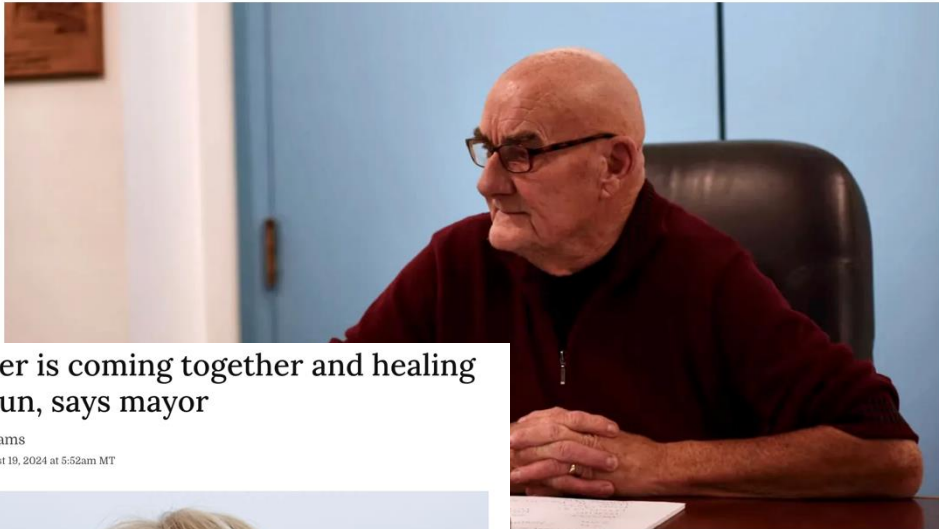



Image taken from a town video.

Hay River is coming together and healing has begun, says mayor

 Ollie Williams
Monday August 19, 2024 at 5:52am MT



Mayor Kandis Jameson. Aastha Sethi/Cabin Radio

News Business Sports Opinion Arts Life Shopping Upcoming Events Newsletters Puzzmo Driving ePaper Remembering Classifieds Manage Print Subscription

Columnists

Opinion: Mayor underappreciated for all the good she does for the city

By [Mike Shaikh](#)
Published Feb 14, 2024 Last updated Feb 14, 2024 3 minute read 63 Comments



Transcript: Mayor Mamdani Releases Balanced Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget

February 17, 2026

OTTAWA CITIZEN

Jim Watson tops list of Canada's most popular mayors

Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson is the most popular mayor in Canada, according to a poll in 10 of the country's largest cities.
Blair Crawford · Ottawa Citizen
Published Jan 16, 2017 · 3 minute read
 Join the conversation



Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson scored a 79 per cent approval rating in a Mainstreet/Postmedia poll. PHOTO BY TONY CALDWELL /Postmedia

Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson is the most popular mayor in Canada, according to a poll in 10 of the country's largest cities.

Watson scored a 79 per cent approval rating in a Mainstreet/Postmedia poll released Monday, outpacing runner-up Charlie Clark of Saskatoon and even Calgary's popular and high-profile Naheed Nenshi.



What Roles Do You Play as Mayor/Chief?

Chairperson

Facilitator

Spokesperson

Intermediary

Mentor

Role Model

“First Among Equals”

What does a Mayor/Chief need to do to be effective?

Balance vision, action and people skills

Listen

Actively support Council to work together

Build relationships

Be transparent and accountable

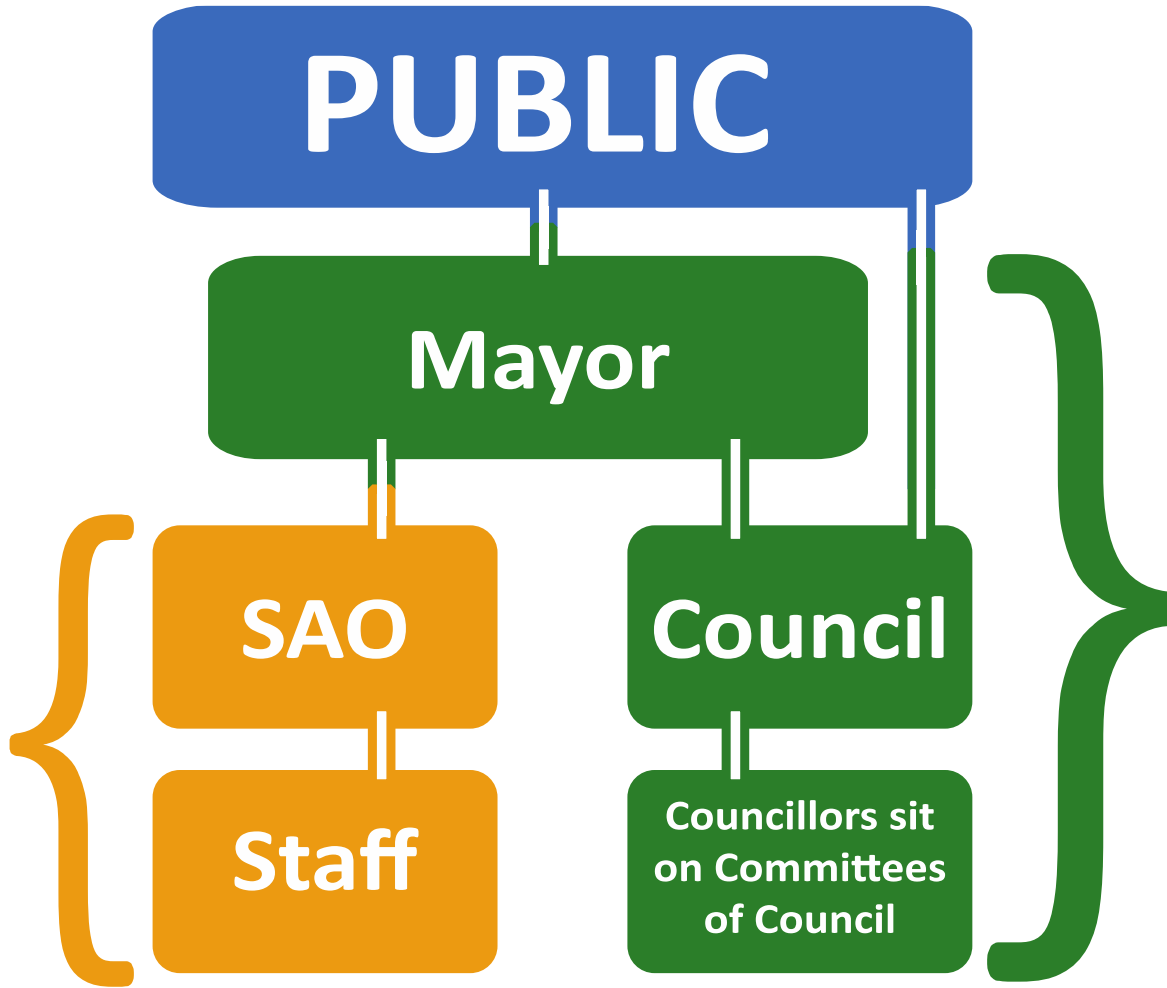
Work productively with administration

Stay Adaptable

Include everyone



ADMINISTRATION
Implement policy, programs and services)



GOVERNANCE
(Sets direction, policy and budget)

Your Role

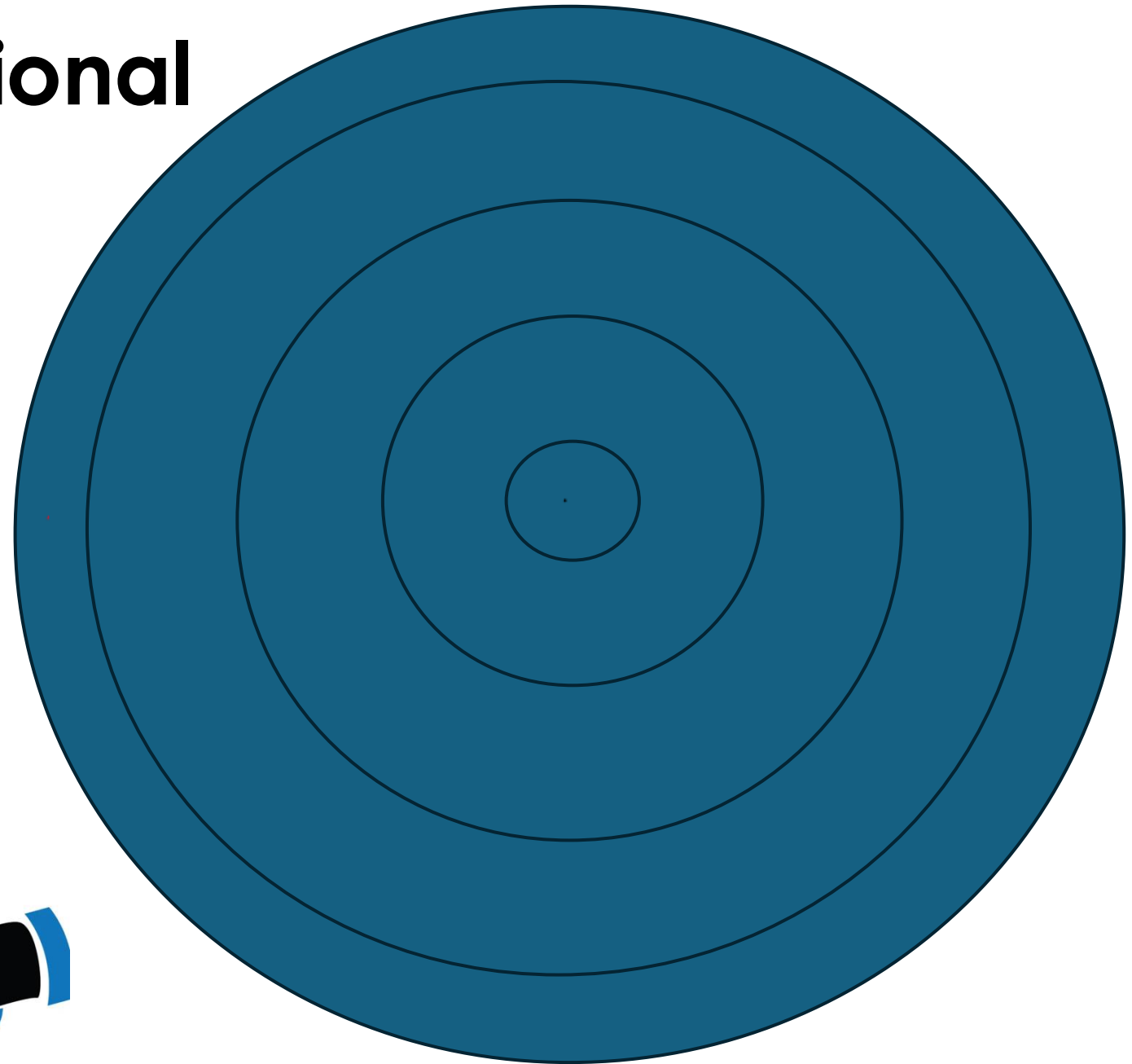


Maintaining Professional Relationships

Power Wheel concept:

Tracking the relationships you need to spend time on – some more than others

- Centre: You
- Circle 1: SAO, Council members
- Circle 2: other local gov'ts, residents, Chamber of Commerce, NGOs
- Circle 3: GNWT, feds, regional indigenous gov'ts, funders, Industry. developers



Good Councils...

Build, and work together on, a common vision and shared priorities

Understand the rules of engagement

Build and maintain trust

Maintain confidentiality when its needed

Prepare, discuss and debate

Show respect





Q: Supporting Council to Work as a Team

Council has a heated discussion *incamera* on a hot issue and no conclusion is reached. A few days later, a resident comes up to you and is upset with the position that he heard you took on this issue. What do you do?

- A. Thank him for expressing his opinion and let him know no decision has yet been made. The include for Council a reaffirmation of Council procedures, particularly for *incamera* discussions
- B. Deny your position and then go after the Councillor you suspect of talking
- C. Tell the resident to back off and you'll do whatever you believe is right

Leadership in a Crisis

Imperial Oil to 'wind down' Norman Wells operations later in 2026



Ollie Williams

Friday January 30, 2026 at 7:22am MT

Updated: January 30, 2026 at 12:26pm MT



Yellowknife mayor vows all residents will get out after orders to evacuate city

Fixing Hay River water needs time. Officials say it needs context, too.



Aastha Sethi and Ollie Williams

Friday November 7, 2025 at 8:21am MT



Nenshi on the 2013 flood: 5 memorable quotes



By Lisa Geddes · Global News

Posted June 15, 2014 2:31 pm · Updated June 17, 2014 2:16 pm · 2 min read





Q: Leadership During Crisis

Wildfires, floods, low water, no barges, industry closure, internet outages, extreme weather.... These can quickly become a crisis for your community.

- What's the role of the Mayor/Chief during a crisis?
- In your experience :
 - What worked well?
 - Anything you think should have been done differently?
 - What surprised you?



Chairing and Leading Meetings

- The Chair's leadership matters
- The way a Chair introduces discussions, enforces rules, intervenes when boundaries are crossed and protects staff sets the tone
- The Chair makes sure:
 - Council makes principled decisions
 - Staff feel safe and supported
 - The public can trust the process and the outcome even if they don't agree with the decision


Council governs
The Chair upholds the process
The SAO/Band Manager is the link to Administration

The Chair's Main Responsibilities

- Procedural leader – protect the integrity safety and fairness of Council's decision making process
- A fair process produces legitimate decisions even when debate is difficult

The Chair:

- Upholds procedures so the process is predictable
- maintains the boundaries
- supports full participation and respectful dialogue
- shields administration



THE CHAIR INVITES JOHN TO SPEAK

The Chair Prepares

- Review the agenda in advance
- Meet with the SAO/Band Manager to review
- Prepare for any sensitive or high risk items
- Make sure staff have the meeting space ready – live, virtual or hybrid

Opening the Meeting

- **The way that the Chair does this sets the tone** for respectful interactions and procedural integrity. Steps the Chair should take include:
 - Call the meeting to order clearly and confidently
 - Confirm quorum
 - Deliver land acknowledgement
 - Review the agenda and invite amendment and/or adoption
 - Ask for Declarations of Conflict of Interest
 - State the expectations for conduct (e.g., reference adherence to Procedures Bylaw), especially for hybrid in-person and online meetings, or if there are potentially controversial topics on the agenda

Receiving Presentations

Presentations from Administration – the Chair should:

- Introduce the item clearly
- Invite the SAO/Band Manager to present (they have the option to call upon other staff to present or answer questions)
- After the presentation, open the floor to Council members to ask clarifying questions, not debate
- Ensure all questions go through the Chair, who will pass these to the SAO/Band Manager, who in turn can call on staff to answer
- Redirect questions that become operational or political argument.

Welcoming Delegations

Other governments, stakeholder groups, citizens ask to present to Council

- Consistently follow procedures for getting onto the agenda
- Welcome the delegation and remind them of the parameters for their presentation
 - Direct comment to the Chair
 - Time limit
 - Respectful and relevant comments
 - No personal or defamatory or discriminatory comments
 - Council questions are for clarification only
 - Debate by Council comes after

Motions/BCRs

- Motions/BCRs are a key decision-making tool for Council
- Be clear on the Motion – confusion over what's being debated is a common issue
- Types of Motions
 - Main Motion, Amendment, Referral/deferral, Table
 - Point of Order, Point of Privilege
- Manage the debate
 - Maintain a list of speakers & recognize one at a time
 - Keep debate focused and summarize to bring debate towards decision
 - Recap especially when there have been amendments, so everyone is clear on what's being voted on
- Calling the vote
 - Restate the motion, confirm Members are ready to vote and conduct the vote
 - Announce the result neutrally

Closing the Meeting, and After

- End the meeting respectfully and professionally:
 - Thank Council, Administration and delegations for their participation
 - Provide a brief neutral summary of any next steps
 - Confirm the date of the next meeting
 - Adjourn clearly and decisively
- After:
 - Clarify any follow up with the SAO/Band Manager and debrief on what worked and what didn't and any changes as a result
 - Ensure Motions and directions are accurately captured in the Minutes
 - Avoid debating decisions on social media or in person
 - Don't contradict Council's decision
 - Prepare for any media questions

Leading Difficult/High Profile Meetings

- Differing positions on an issue doesn't mean there will be conflict, but its wise to anticipate
- Meetings with controversial agenda items can fall apart due to insufficient preparation, unclear expectations or delayed intervention by the Chair.
- When the stakes are high, the Chair has to prepare to manage discussions thoroughly in advance
- An opening statement can help set the tone:

“Before we begin, I want to acknowledge that this item has generated strong feelings in the community. We will follow our required process, and all comments must remain respectful, focused on the issue and directed through myself. Personal or defamatory comments will not be permitted. Everyone will have an opportunity to be heard and Council will debate the item only after the public portion is closed.”



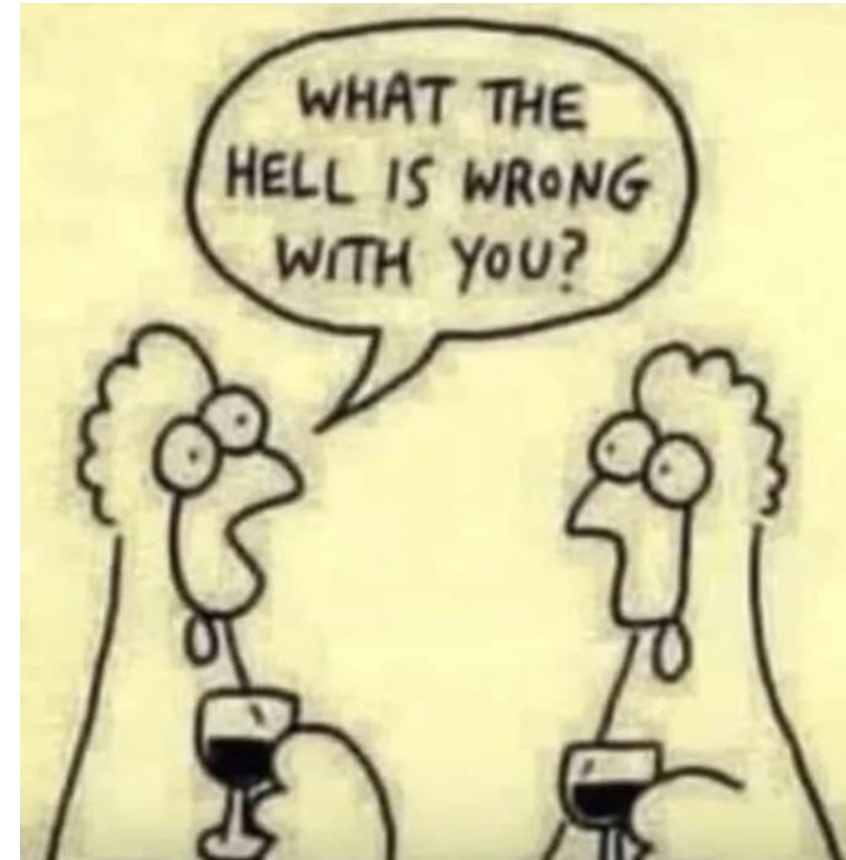
Managing Bad Behaviour in a Meeting

- Consistent use of clear transparent and predictable guidelines can help lay out what is and isn't acceptable
- Disrespectful, confrontational comments and personal attacks must be addressed immediately
- The Chair should:
 - Reiterate the government frameworks (procedures bylaw, Code of conduct. Etc)
 - Model calm, neutral leadership
 - Apply the rules consistently
 - Keep debate issue focused
 - Ensure staff are not targeted or drawn in to political debate
 - Use short recesses to de-escalate as needed
 - Address incivility right away



Managing Conflict Between Councillors

- Conflict between Councillors has to be managed or it can damage governance overall
- This can look like personal attacks, repeated harassment, discriminatory or threatening remarks, refusal to follow the Chair's ruling. When this happens the Chair must:
 - Stop the interaction immediately
 - Require comments to be made through the Chair
 - Redirect debate back to the issue
 - Treat all members consistently, and apply the rules consistently
 - Remain calm and procedural
 - Call a recess if needed



Sarnia...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAMRRvDVnaE>

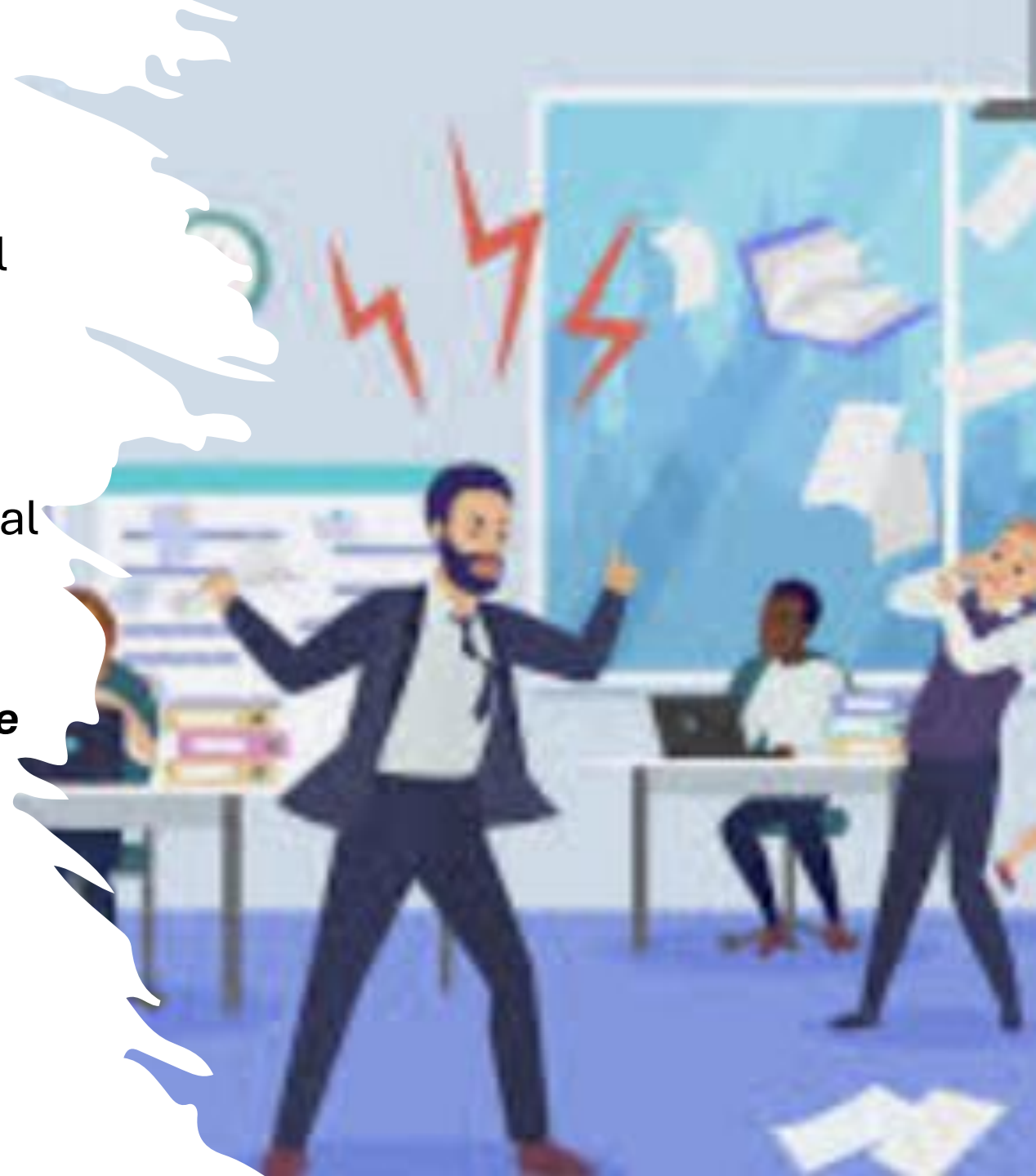
Shielding Administration

Staff attend meetings to provide professional expert advice that informs Council's discussion of issues

They are not there to be pulled into political debate or defend their advice

Protecting staff is not discretionary, it is a legal ethical and governance obligation

- ***“Questions to Administration must always be respectful and for clarification only.”***
- ***“Administration is here to provide expert advice, not to debate or have to defend themselves. Please limit your questions to factual clarification.”***
- ***“Staff are not here to be cross-examined, please direct your questions through the Chair.”***



”Top 10” for Effective Chairing

	To Chair a Meeting effectively...
1	Prepare thoroughly in advance
2	Ensure proper notice and quorum
3	Enforce Procedures and Rules of Order consistently
4	Set a professional tone
5	Keep discussions focused and on topic
6	Ensure equitable participation
7	Summarize discussions and clarify motions
8	Manage delegation input firmly and fairly
9	Guide towards consensus and decisions
10	Review action items and document decisions

Common Mistakes and What to do Instead

Instead of...	Try...
Debating from the Chair	Protect the process and step out of the Chair role (pass the Chair) if you want to advocate
Waiting too long to intervene	Intervene early, calmly and appropriately
Weaponizing procedure	Apply procedure consistently and neutrally all the time
Losing neutrality through tone or body language	Be the calmest person in the room
Allowing staff to be drawn into debate	Redirect questions and protect staff immediately
Failing to clarify the motion	Restate the motion and amendments before debating or voting
Letting debate drift off topic	Anchor discussion to the motion on the floor
Avoiding recesses when tensions rise	Use recesses strategically to reset and restore order
Taking behaviour issues personally	Address behaviour procedurally not personally
Forgetting that the Chair sets the culture	Model respect, consistency and calm language

Ian MacCormack...

Setting Policy and Priorities

- Council's role as policy-makers
- Setting high level, long term direction
- Vision, Bylaws, Budgets, Action Plans, Motions/BCRs
- Always keeping in mind the core and essential work of the local government (water, sewage, roads, fire protection)

Ask Yourself:

- What programs and services are we delivering?
- To what level
- What resources do we need to deliver these (people, buildings, equipment, \$\$)



Q: Setting Direction

A Councillor suggests that the local government give every household live chickens – for eggs and then meat - to address high food costs. You think this is stupid. What do you do?

- A. Tell the Councillor she's an idiot, that's the dumbest thing you've ever heard
- B. Ask them what is the root issue they're trying to fix and why is this a good solution. What are the implications? Implementation issues? Are there other options that could address the issue?
- C. Ignore the suggestion and talk afterwards to other Councillors and residents about what a stupid idea this was and how dumb this Councillor is





Mayor's/Chief's Role in Setting Priorities

- Support Council to be Policy Makers
- Keep the focus where it should be – big picture, not operations – and bring Council members back to the issue when they stray
- Ensure Administration is providing the information Council needs to make good, informed decisions

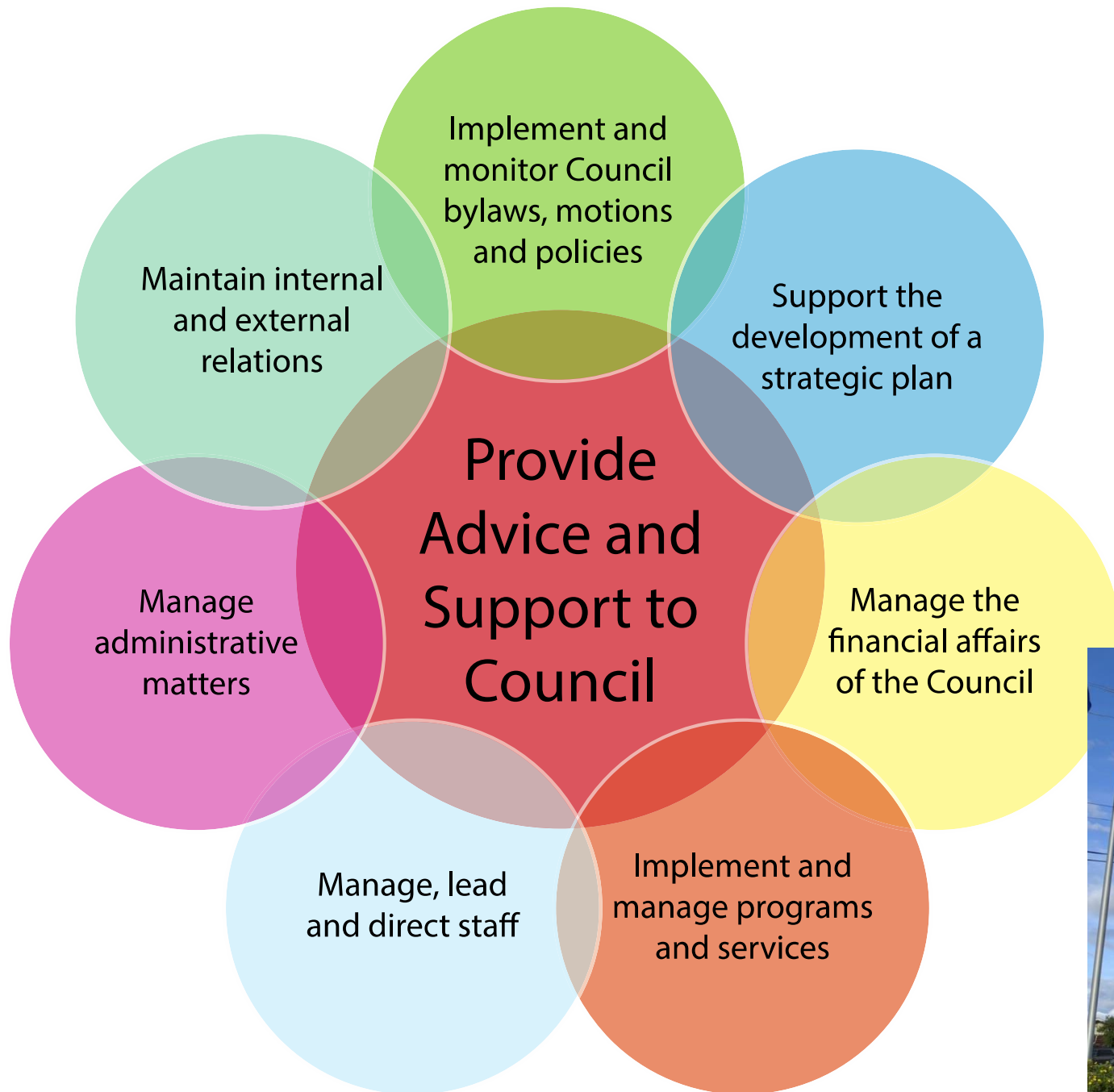


Q: Service levels

A resident calls you to complain about the lack of snow clearing on their street. What do you do?

- A. Tell them to stop complaining, it could be worse
- B. Tell them they're right and the Public Works staff are a bunch of lazy slackers who can't figure out how to do their jobs
- C. Go to the Public Works garage and tell the crew to deal with that street ASAP
- D. Thank the resident and confirm you'll look into it. Let the SAO know of the complaint and ask for an ETA of when it should be dealt with. Let the resident know. Encourage Administration to put some comms out.

Role of the SAO/Band Manager



The SAO/Band Manager Supports Council decision-making and Leads Operations

Supports Council

- When Council makes policy:
 - Gives advice, provides information/data/evidence; outlines options; ensures compliance; lays out implications; outlines implementation requirements
- When Council sets direction:
 - Implements direction; provides information/data; develops action plans; reports on progress; assesses performance
- When Council engages and represents the public:
 - Reflects knowledge/data/evidence; remains objective & apolitical; as thorough as appropriate; stays current

Leads operations

- Ensure legal, regulatory and service obligations are met
- Manage staff and resources
- Deliver results





Q: Your Role with Operations

Your cousin works for the local government and comes to you to complain about his boss, the Public Works Foreman. He says the Foreman isn't assigning work, picks favourites in the shop and lets his friends use the PW garage after hours. What do you do?

- A. Go with your cousin to the PW garage and confront the Foreman, and tell him to smarten up
- B. Ignore your cousin, he complains about everything and everyone all the time
- C. Let the SAO know about the allegations so that s/he can look into it and sort it out if there are indeed issues (HR issues and inappropriate use of the shop after hours)

Q: Mayor & SAO ... Chief & Band Manager

Special direct working relationship

- Mayor/Chief is Council's link to the SAO/BM for communication, direction and reporting
- They need to have a trusting respectful relationship with no surprises
- The Mayor/Chief is the "first among equals" - not more powerful than Councillors, and not the boss who makes decisions on his/her own, telling the SAO what to do - who leads, liaises, facilitates and coordinates.

What do you do to build and maintain a good working relationship with your SAO/Band Manager?

National News posted Mar 22, 2024 @ 11:50am by Canadian Press

'Profoundly disappointed': Medicine Hat council rebukes mayor over tense exchange with city manager

The mayor of Medicine Hat, Alta., has had her powers – and pay – greatly diminished after city council found she breached the code of conduct by failing to treat the city manager with "courtesy, dignity and respect."

At a special meeting Thursday, Medicine Hat city council unanimously censured Mayor Linnsie Clark, stripped her of many of her powers and halved her salary as a result of a [tense exchange with city manager Ann Mitchell](#) in August.

"We are all profoundly disappointed in your actions. The city has a duty to provide a safe and respectful workplace for its employees, including our city manager," said acting Mayor Andy McGrogan as he read the letter of reprimand into the record.

Being SAO/Band Manager isn't easy...

8 months, zero live meetings: Inside the tension hobbling Sarnia's strained city council

Sarnia city council hasn't met in-person for eight months amid conflicts involving one politician. Can a solution be found?

By Tyler Kula

Published Jan 13, 2025 • Last updated Jan 13, 2025 • 7 minute read



Joseph Turner • Following

Host of City Manager Unfiltered podcast | Founder of the American...
1mo • 🌐

... all their

Always a fun time for the city manager when the mayor decides to put up a new fence in violation of the code. ...more



Fence code to be reviewed by city council after mayor's violation

whidbeynewstimes.com



Joseph Turner • Following

Host of City Manager Unfiltered podcast | Founder of the American...
1mo • 🌐

An elected official in Virginia admits he lied about the city manager in public comments and has stepped up and made a very public apology. Pretty egregious behavior to engage in such conduct followed by an equally surprising gesture to n

In other stories -- a capital city city manager. Insert joke here!



Local News

Bad behaviour from public a factor in increased harassment, discrimination results, city says

Paige Parsons

Published Jan 24, 2019 • 2 minute read

Join the conversation

NEWS > NORTHERN KENTUCKY

Ludlow council member accused of licking city administrator

City administrator files complaint with mayor after 'bizarre' incident.

WTF!



Hiring and Keeping Your SAO/Band Manager

Hiring

- Look for the right skills and competencies
- Do reference checks!

Keeping

- Set clear direction, don't micro manage
- Support their ongoing development and training
- Functional Council
- respectful working relationship with Council
- Recognize good work

A photograph of a white building with a blue door. On the wall is a large logo featuring a stylized mountain range in green and blue, with a yellow sun or moon behind it, all enclosed in a blue arch. Below the logo, the words "TOWN OFFICE" are written in large, dark, block letters. To the left of the door, there is a red "NO SMOKING" sign with a white circle and a slash over a cigarette icon. Below that, there is a smaller white sign with black text that reads "MINIMUM 10' CLEARANCE AT THE POINT OF ENTRY".

TOWN OFFICE

Working Effectively with your SAO/Band Manager

- Council has one employee: SAO or Band Manager
- Their role is to give good advice, run operations, support staff to do their jobs, be a role model
- ‘Speak truth to power’ – risky part of the job
- Both Council and SAO/BM need to work to build trust – if trust is broken, its hard to work productively in the best interest of the community
- Build trust by:
 - Define and respect roles and responsibilities
 - Good communication, no surprises
 - Transparency and respect



Media Relations

- Media have a job to do – they are not the enemy
- Media are partners in sharing the good work of your local government, not just reporting on tough stuff
- Media want to hear what’s going on in your community – its smart to proactively share news stories with them
- Interviews can be *alot* but if you prepare, and practice, you’ll be a great spokesperson for your community
- People WANT to hear from the Mayor/Chief



Reopening after an upgrade, Fort McPherson's arena is a hit

Chloe Williams · Wednesday January 22, 2025 at 5:55am MT



Fort McPherson's arena is seen in a photo supplied by the hamlet.

Media Relations

A professional microphone with a brown mesh grille is mounted on a black stand. It is positioned in front of a silver laptop, which is open and shows a dark screen. The background is slightly blurred, showing a desk with a pen and other items. The overall scene suggests a recording or interview setup.

For an interview:

- Prepare!
- Set the tone – be friendly but don't assume the media is your friend
- Have your key messages ready
- An interview is not a conversation – be ready to stay on message
- Anticipate questions, especially tough ones
- Don't lose your cool
- Answer the question and then be quiet – don't fill the space
- Don't go “off the record” unless you really REALLY trust the journalist



In Closing...

Leading Council for the benefit of your community is a rewarding and challenging job

You were elected by residents of your community so you're doing something right!

People believe in you and your ability to lead

Keep building your skills – leadership is a journey not a destination

Believe in yourself and your capabilities

Take care of yourself